

07/08/21 Thursday

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Haitian Police Identified 26 Colombians, 2 Americans Linked to Moïse's Assassination
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The United States and United Nations have pledged their support for the interim Haitian government following the Wednesday assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse, but it was the Washington Post's editorial board that penned a furious article calling for a "swift and muscular" intervention.

Leon Charles, director general of the Haitian National Police (PNH), announced on Thursday that "It was a commando of 28 attackers, including 26 Colombians who carried out the operation to assassinate the president." He specified that two Americans and 15 Colombians had been arrested, three Colombians had been killed and eight others remained at large.

"Weapons and materials used by the assailants have been recovered," he added.

Colombian Defense Minister Diego Molano Aponte said later that the suspected murderers of Moïse are retired Colombian military.

"Over the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse, Interpol has asked today the Colombian government and national police to share the information about perpetrators of this crime. The preliminary information shows that these are Colombian citizens, retired military of the national army," the minister [wrote on his Twitter page](#) on late Thursday.

He added that the Colombian government had told police and the army to immediately assist in the investigation.

The embassy of the partially-recognized Republic of China (Taiwan) to Haiti announced later on Friday that 11 suspected assassins of President Moïse were arrested on its territory.

According to the mission, on early Thursday, Haitian police asked the mission for a permit to conduct an operation on its grounds to search the suspected attackers.

Earlier on Thursday, Mathias Pierre, Haiti's minister of elections and inter-party relations, [identified one of the men](#) captured by police as James Solages, an American citizen, and said that a second man was believed to be a Haitian-American. The US State Department has not yet confirmed Solages' American citizenship.

Initial reports based on a video and eyewitnesses indicated the [assassins were "foreigners"](#) who spoke Spanish and English and identified themselves as agents of the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), a US federal police agency.

The DEA, created in 1973 and formally tasked with disrupting the drug trade, commonly operates in other nations and trains and behaves as a largely [independent paramilitary outfit](#).

The DEA has long operated in Colombia, targeting the country's coca growers and drug lords. However, Bocchit Edmond, Haiti's ambassador to the United States, [told Sputnik](#) there was "no way" they were DEA agents.

"They were pretending themselves to be the agents of the DEA operation. We know it's false because they just wanted to mask the horrible act," he said.

In the wake of the president's death, acting Prime Minister Claude Joseph, a Moïse appointee, has been recognized as the country's de facto leader by the United Nations until new elections for president and parliament can be organized. Joseph has implemented a two-week state of emergency, giving the police broad powers to chase down the perpetrators. Charles said Thursday night at the presser that "We will strengthen our investigation and search techniques to intercept the other eight mercenaries."

Elected in 2015 in a disputed election whose resolution delayed his inauguration by a year, Moïse faced mass protests during nearly all of his tenure as president, but especially in the last year. Moïse had effectively ruled by decree since January 2020, when he allowed parliament's mandate to expire without holding new elections, and in February 2021 he continued to remain in power despite the country's highest court ruling his term to be over. [Huge protests saw](#) Haitians demand Moïse step down and that the US stop backing his claim to power.

The US, UN, [World Bank](#) and other international organizations have pledged their support for the interim Haitian government. "We stand ready and stand by them to provide any assistance that's needed," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Wednesday.

However, the most fervent calls for involvement came from the editorial board of [the Washington Post](#), which wrote Wednesday evening that "swift and muscular intervention is needed" because, "simply put, there is no one with any real authority in position to run the country."

"To prevent a meltdown that could have dire consequences, the United States and other influential parties - including France, Canada and the Organization of American States - should push for an international peacekeeping force, probably organized by the United Nations, that could provide the security necessary for presidential and parliamentary elections to go forward this year, as planned," argued the newspaper, which is owned by Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man and founder of Amazon.

Haiti was once a colony of France, but its massive African slave population rose up in revolution and won independence in 1804, establishing a republic. However, the country, destroyed by war, was not allowed to recover after surrounding nations like the United States, which still kept Black people enslaved, ostracized Haiti, turning it into an international pariah. Repeated military interventions ever since have kept the country poor and pliant to US business interests, like the [Clinton Global Initiative](#), which critics say put the interests of international corporations' sweatshops and mines over those of the Haitian people while directing the rebuilding effort in the wake of the catastrophic 2010 earthquake.

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Haitian Police Chief: All of Moïse Hit Squad Arrested or Killed, Officers Now Hunting Masterminds
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

A day after Haitian President Jovenel Moïse was killed by gunmen at his house outside Port-au-Prince, Haitian National Police (PNH) have apprehended several suspects and killed

several more. Mathias Pierre, Haiti's minister of elections and inter-party relations, said the commando behind the assassination had 26 members.

Speaking at a press conference on Thursday, United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti Helen La Lime said that few facts were known about the assault on the Moïse's house in the Pelerin neighborhood of southern Port-au-Prince that killed the president and wounded his wife, Martine.

"A number of arrests have been made as the police are working very hard to arrest the commando that entered the compound and attacked the President and the First Lady," she said. "What I have now is that in the last 12 hours, the four members of the group that raided the presidential residence have been killed by the police, while another six are [now in police custody](#)," she added.

On Thursday afternoon, PNH Chief Leon Charles announced police had captured the final suspects behind the attack and were now looking for the masterminds.

"So far we have arrested six people for their alleged involvement in the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, four others have been eliminated, of which three are foreigners," Charles told reporters. However, according to local news reports, the PNH had detained two other people as well, bringing the total to eight arrested.

Charles later said seven members of the hit squad had been eliminated.

According to Pierre, one of the men arrested is a US citizen named James Solages. Pierre told the [Washington Post](#) he believed another suspect was also Haitian-American, but gave no specifics. The US State Department has not yet verified Solages' American citizenship.

Video filmed of the hit squad assembling outside Moïse's house just before the assault shows them claiming to be agents of the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), a US federal police agency, in an apparent ruse to disarm Moïse's guards. Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond dismissed the notion they could have been DEA agents in Wednesday [comments to Sputnik](#).

Pierre also said later on Thursday that the commando consisted of 26 people, and La Lime further added that officials in the Dominican Republic, which shares the island with Haiti, couldn't confirm if any of the perpetrators had escaped into the country.

A crowd had formed Thursday outside the Port-au-Prince police station where the suspects were being held. PNH chief Charles appealed to them and the broader public for calm in a television address.

"The special units are trying to protect the police station, because the population is very mad and is trying to get to them, to burn them," Pierre told the Post. "We're trying to avoid that."

Post-Moïse Haiti Plans

La Lime added Thursday that acting Prime Minister Claude Joseph, appointed by Moïse earlier this year, would remain the country's de facto leader for now. She urged the need for unity in the country and cautioned that things were too unstable for elections to be held at the moment.

"Stakeholders need to set aside their differences and to chart a common way forward and overcome this difficult moment in a peaceful manner," she urged.

The UN envoy said both presidential and parliamentary elections were expected to hold their first round on September 26, with a second round sometime in November. Prior to his death, Moïse had ruled by decree for more than a year after allowing parliament's mandate to expire

without further elections, and his own presidential term was ruled by the Superior Council of the Judiciary to have [expired in February](#), although he claimed he had another year left.

The US backed Moïse's claims, prompting mass protests demanding the Biden administration drop its support for Moïse and that he step down and call elections.

In the aftermath of Moïse's killing on Wednesday morning, Joseph declared a two-week-long [state of emergency](#), giving police wide-ranging powers to hunt down the assassins. He also declared a 15-day period of mourning for the slain 53-year-old president, who had ruled Haiti since 2016.

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US' Israel Embassy Issues Rare Rebuke of 'Punitive Demolition' of Palestinian Home in West Bank

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

After Israeli authorities demolished the house of a Palestinian-American family in the West Bank, the US embassy in Jerusalem issued a rare rebuke of Israeli policy on Thursday, calling on "all parties to refrain from unilateral steps that exacerbate tensions and undercut efforts to advance a negotiated two-state solution."

On Wednesday morning, Israeli troops detonated explosives around the house of the Shalabi family in the village of Turmis Ayya, about halfway between Nablus and Ramallah in the West Bank. The demolition was retaliatory, done as punishment by an Israeli military court after Muntasir Shalabi was indicted for a May attack on three Israeli students, one of whom died from his wounds.

The demolition was captured on film and circulated widely on social media.

Muntasir's wife, Sanaa, and three of their children, aged 17, 12, and 9, had lived in the home. Sanaa told [the Associated Press](#) she and her husband had been estranged for several years and that he typically lived in the United States, but would periodically visit the family's Turmis Ayya abode. However, an Israeli court ruled the house could be destroyed because Muntasir had reportedly lived there in the weeks prior to the attack and had lived there continuously from 2006 to 2012.

"They want to demoralize us, but we are steadfast. This is the situation of the entire Palestinian people," Sanaa said, describing her husband as a "resister."

In response, the US Embassy to Israel issued [a rare condemnation](#) of the "punitive demolition of Palestinian homes," adding that "as we stated numerous times, the home of an entire family should not be demolished for the actions of one individual."

Under former US President Donald Trump, Washington provided almost unprecedented support for Israeli actions, recognizing Israel's claims to the Golan Heights, which it seized from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War, and moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which Israel seized the eastern half of in the same conflict and has subsequently also annexed and declared the city to be its capital.

While his predecessor who took office in January, Joe Biden, has shown some signs he would not give Israel as free a hand as Trump was willing to, rumors that he would reverse Trump's recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan last month were [quickly swatted down](#) by State Department officials.

In 2004, the Israel Defense Forces concluded in an internal review sparked by US complaints that the practice of punitive home demolitions was not an effective deterrent. It halted the practice until 2014, when it was resumed after three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped and killed in the West Bank.

Israel has occupied the territory since 1967, building numerous settlements for Jewish colonists and military outposts to defend them from Palestinians, many of whom have been evicted from their homes in order to make way for the Jewish communities. The United Nations has decried Israel's occupation and its colonization of the West Bank, as well as its annexation of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

In a response to the embassy's comment, an official from the office of Israeli Prime Minister Naftali [Bennett told Reuters](#): "The prime minister appreciates and respects the US administration. At the same time, it acts solely in accordance with the security considerations of the State of Israel and the protection of the lives of Israeli citizens."

Shalabi was allegedly responsible for a [May 2 drive-by shooting](#) at the Tapuach junction checkpoint near Nablus in which three 19-year-old students from religious college in Itamar were shot, one of whom, named Yehuda Guetta, later died.

In response to the incident, Bennett, at the time still merely a member of the Knesset and not yet head of government, [said on Twitter](#) that Israel must respond "decisively" and with "an iron fist and the continuation of our hold on the Land of Israel."

Bennett has long expressed support for annexation of the West Bank, although he made a promise not to pursue it during his prime ministership as a part of the delicate negotiations that created his ruling coalition's [precarious alliance](#). However, his government, just weeks old, has [already signed off](#) on new construction projects in Jewish settler communities.

There are about 475,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank, who enjoy preferential rights compared to the roughly 2.8 million Palestinians there.

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Photos: Is China Testing Another Su-27 Derivative for Aircraft Carriers Alongside Its Infamous J-15?

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

As China puts the final touches on a catapult-assisted takeoff aircraft carrier, expectations are high about newer, heavier aircraft with the potential to join Chinese naval aviation. However, photos posted on Chinese social media might have accidentally hinted at an as-yet unknown potentiality: A J-11B or J-16 modified for carrier operations.

After the Sina Weibo page “People’s Liberation Army News” [posted photos](#) from a recent drill by a naval aviation squadron, analysts began to focus on an unusual detail in the background of one of the photos.

Andreas Rupprecht, a German author and expert on Chinese aviation, [wrote on Twitter](#) on Thursday that “the latest image (July 2021) suggested that one navalized J-16H (?) prototype was being evaluated by PLAN. And indeed, at least due to the long sting it is NOT a J-15 and by its longer part of the rudder it looks like a J-11BSH or J-16.”

His attention was drawn to the back right of the image, to the tail section of an aircraft painted in the fluorescent yellow used by Chinese test aircraft, and its unusually long “sting,” or the long protrusion backward from between the engines that resembles an insect’s stinger.

In reality, the “stinger” is a self-protection suite housing a radar warning receiver, a chaff and flare dispenser, and an electronic countermeasures unit. All members of the Su-27 family of aircraft have one, including the Chinese J-11, J-15 and [J-16 aircraft](#). Rupprecht didn’t mention the Su-30MK2, which has an extra-large stinger housing an electro-optical reconnaissance pod. However, the J-15’s are notably shorter than the others in order to accommodate high angles of attack that risk slamming the stinger against the flight deck during landing; this mystery’s jet’s is quite long.

At present, the [J-15 “Flying Shark”](#) is the PLA Navy’s only carrier-based fixed-wing aircraft. Due to both of the PLAN’s carriers using bow ramps to launch aircraft, the J-15s are seriously limited in what they can accomplish, being forced to carry lighter loads due to their great size and weight. However, the forthcoming [Type 003 super carrier](#) under construction in Shanghai’s Jiangnan Shipyard will for the first time be equipped with electromagnetic aircraft catapults, which will whisk the jets off the front of the ship at a quicker speed than they could hope to achieve using the bow ramp, giving them the potential to become fearsome weapons of the sky. Shenyang Aircraft Corporation, maker of the three aircraft being discussed, also revealed last year it was developing a [new naval aircraft](#), which is widely speculated to be a derivative of its FC-31 stealth aircraft tester. The KJ-600 airborne early warning aircraft is also in development. Additionally, several [fixed-wing drones](#) have been tested and fielded that could further increase the carrier’s potency.

Perhaps the biggest question about a carrier-based variant of either the J-11B or J-16 is: why? The J-15 is capable of both air superiority and surface strike roles, as is the J-11B, while the J-16 is mostly a strike aircraft, albeit 18 years newer. Moreover, both the J-11B and J-16 already perform land-based naval patrols.

It could have to do with the small number of J-15s built, or perhaps that the J-11 is about 6,000 pounds lighter than the notoriously heavy J-15, but the J-16 is basically the same weight as the J-15. In nearly all other respects, including size, range, and speed, the two aircraft aren’t different enough from the J-15 to warrant such tests.

However, it might not be carrier ops that the PLAN is testing the jet on, either. This is all an elaborate extrapolation from a single grainy photo, after all.

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'We're Ending America's Longest War': Biden Reveals US Troops Will Leave Afghanistan by August 31

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The Biden administration previously stated it would be wrapping up the US mission in Afghanistan by September 11, a date that would mark the 20th anniversary of the 2001 terrorist attacks. The Biden White House's revised timeline came after the US failed to fully withdraw from the war-torn nation by the previous administration's May 1 pullout.

US President Joe Biden declared on Thursday that a complete US withdrawal of US service members from Afghanistan will conclude on August 31, less than two weeks before the 9/11 deadline that had been initially proposed by the administration.

Offering the nation an update on the US' withdrawal procedures, Biden informed the public that the US military has "achieved" its goals in Afghanistan, underscoring that the continued US support for the people of the Middle Eastern country will "endure."

"The United States did what we went to do in Afghanistan: get the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 and get Osama bin Laden," Biden remarked. "We did not go to Afghanistan to nation build."

"We're ending America's longest war," he emphasized, further adding that he has no intentions to "send another generation of Americans to war in Afghanistan with no reasonable expectation to achieve a different outcome. The United States cannot afford to remain tethered to policies created in response to a world as it was 20 years ago."

Directly addressing officials who opposed troop withdrawal efforts, Biden acknowledged that prolonging the US' stay in Afghanistan would more than likely lead to an increase in attacks against American troops. However, he also stated that no US forces have been lost during the ongoing withdrawal procedures.

'Highly Unlikely' Taliban Forces Will Grab Ahold of Nation

Asked about the future government of Afghanistan, Biden stressed to reporters that it's "highly unlikely" that the Taliban would be overrunning the nation, even if the militant force appears to be "at its strongest" point since 2001.

He later stated that it's ultimately up to the Afghan people to determine "what government they want" as no outside nation has ever unified Afghanistan.

"It's up to the Afghans to make decisions about the future of their country," he said.

The president, seemingly appearing frustrated with reporters' questions, reiterated that while he "does not trust the Taliban," he does "trust the capacity of the Afghan military" as forces are "more competent in terms of conducting war" if need be. Biden's statement came just as [reports detailed](#) that Taliban forces had seized a third key border crossing along the nation's borders with Iran.

Over the near 20-year stay in Afghanistan, US forces trained and equipped some 300,000 Afghan forces. "They clearly have the capacity to keep the government in place, the question is will they come together, and will they do it," Biden remarked.

Recent reports have suggested that the US intelligence community assessed the current Afghan government could collapse once the US officially withdraws from Afghanistan. Biden addressed the claims during the Thursday event, telling reporters that the assessment is "not true," and that the Afghan "government clearly have the capacity to sustain the government in place."

US Not Abandoning Afghanistan

Biden also took the opportunity to declare that the withdrawal does necessarily indicate that US is abandoning Afghanistan, and will in fact continue to provide humanitarian and security assistance.

"We provided advanced weaponry and we're going to continue to provide funding and equipment [to Afghanistan]," the president said. "We will continue to provide civilian and humanitarian assistance, including speaking out for the rights of women and girls."

"I intend to maintain our diplomatic presence in Afghanistan and we are coordinating closely with our international partners in order to continue to secure the international airport, and we're going to engage in a determined diplomacy to pursue peace and a peace agreement that will end this senseless violence," Biden added.

The US leader further noted that facilities where Afghan interpreters and allies can temporarily occupy have been identified in Afghanistan while they await the approval of special visas that will allow them to relocate outside of the country.

"The operation has identified US facilities outside the continental US as well as in third countries to host our Afghan allies if they so choose. And starting this month, we're going to begin relocation flights for Afghanistan SIV applicants and their families who choose to leave," Biden said after urging Afghan allies that "there is a home for you in the United States."

Biden's Thursday commentary came days after US military forces quietly departed from Afghanistan's Bagram Airfield, which at its peak hosted more than 100,000 US soldiers.

Earlier this week, Gen. Mir Asadullah Kohistani, Bagram's new commander, [told](#) the Associated Press that Afghan military officials were not initially aware that US troops had left the facility, learning of the development more than two hours after their departure.

The base was considered the largest US installation in Afghanistan.

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Marilyn Manson Released on Bail After Turning Himself in Over 2019 Spitting Incident by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The famed controversial musician recently came under renewed public scrutiny after facing multiple allegations of abuse and domestic violence that were voiced by women including actresses Evan Rachel Wood and Esmé Bianco. Investigations into the claims are ongoing by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

American singer-songwriter Marilyn Manson has officially turned himself over to police after months of dodging an outstanding warrant that stemmed from a 2019 spitting incident in New Hampshire, authorities confirmed on Thursday.

Manson, whose real name is Brian Warner, turned himself over to California's Los Angeles Police Department on July 2 for processing and was subsequently released on bail by law enforcement authorities.

The development was confirmed by Anthony Bean Burpee, who serves as the police chief of New Hampshire's Gilford Police Department.

Burpee [told](#) The Hill that the terms of Manson's bail require the musician to not commit a crime while out on bail, appear in all further court proceedings, alert the court to any changes in address and, of course, have zero contact with the videographer at the center of the case. The police chief told the outlet that officials are "pleased with Mr. Warner's decision to finally address the arrest warrant that has been outstanding since 2019."

At present, Manson is facing two counts of simple assault. The Class A misdemeanor charges stem from accusations that Manson allegedly spat on a videographer who had been subcontracted to film a show the musician put on at the Bank of New Hampshire Pavilion in August 2019.

The alleged altercation reportedly occurred when the videographer was filming in the stage pit area at the outdoor amphitheater. An arrest warrant over the incident was issued the following October.

Manson's next court appearance is scheduled to take place at the Fourth Circuit Court in Laconia, New Hampshire. Although Burpee did not specify the date of the appearance, he [previously detailed](#) to USA Today that it would likely take place in August.

If convicted on the offenses, New Hampshire laws dictate that Manson could face a 12-month jail sentence and have to pay a \$2,000 fine.

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Videos: Powerful Magnitude 5.9 Earthquake Rattles Central California, USGS Says
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Hours earlier, magnitude 5.4 earthquakes were registered along the coasts of El Salvador and Chile.

A magnitude 5.9 earthquake has rattled much of the central California region, the US Geological Survey confirmed on Thursday.

Detected just before 4 p.m. local time, the powerful shake was registered by officials at a depth of 9.8 kilometers near the California-Nevada border, just 11 miles from the Golden State's Antelope Peak.

Initial readings placed the shake at a magnitude 6.2 before officials revised their data.

Video shared on social media also captured household items, such as lamps and chandeliers swaying, after the quake hit the area.

[Additional readings](#) in the area note that at least five tremors followed the strong earthquake, some of which measured between magnitude 2.7 and 4.2.

[One testimony](#) listed on the European-Mediterranean Seismological Centre's database described the earthquake as having been "strong" and "long lasting," though it added that the quake did not inflict significant damage.

The California area is often affected by earthquakes as the state is subjected to the rumblings of the San Andreas Fault, a 1,200-kilometer-long fracture between the Pacific and North American tectonic plates.

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Moving on Out - Cartoon

The US initially announced it would be withdrawing from Afghanistan by May 1; however, under the Biden administration, the timeline was revised after officials indicated the operation required additional time to ensure removal procedures are done carefully and securely. Officials eventually imposed a deadline for September 11.

US President Joe Biden announced on Thursday that American troops would be departing from Afghanistan on August 31, exactly 11 days before the deadline previously outlined by the White House.

The [Thursday announcement](#) saw Biden telling the nation that the goals of the US mission in Afghanistan have been “achieved” since the killing of Osama bin Laden and the pushback against al-Qaeda. However, when asked, Biden stressed that “there’s no mission accomplished” in regards to Afghanistan.

Remaining defiant in the face of [recent gains](#) made by the Taliban in the war-torn nation, Biden further underscored that the future of Afghanistan would now be in the hands of its people, as history has proven that no outside nation has successfully managed to unify the country.

“We did not go to Afghanistan to nation-build,” Biden remarked, touching on the US’ extensive [track record](#) on such efforts, some of which more recently include Iraq.

“It’s up to the Afghans to make decisions about the future of their country.”

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Israeli Prime Minister Makes Secret Trip to Visit Jordanian King Over Water Deal - Report by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The 1994 peace treaty between Israel and Jordan settles a variety of contentious issues between the neighboring countries, including matters regarding territory and security and defenses. Israel also agreed to supply Jordan with 50 million cubic meters of water annually in order to survive persistent droughts.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett reportedly met with Jordanian King Abdullah II in secret recently as part of an ongoing effort to ease tensions between the regional neighbors, a move that would mark the first meeting between such counterparts in several years.

Citing a former Israeli official familiar with the development, Axios [reported](#) that the meeting was held at the king’s palace in Amman, Jordan, and saw Bennett inform the king that he was willing to clear a deal that would increase the nation’s water sales to Jordan.

The proposed increase would amount to an additional 50 million cubic meters of water, [according](#) to the Times of Israel. Details of the agreement are expected to be released in the coming days.

However, with the cat out of the bag, reports suggest that one party to the talks wasn't exactly thrilled with the meeting being revealed to the public. A government source revealed to Israel's Channel 12 that King Abdullah II felt "embarrassed" about the leak as both sides had reportedly agreed to keep said talks under wraps.

"It will definitely affect the ties between the nations, after a new page was seemingly turned," the source told the outlet, the Times of Israel reported.

In an effort to address the media frenzy, the Israeli prime minister's office reportedly assured Jordanian counterparts that details of the meeting, which is said to have taken place "last Tuesday," were not divulged by Bennett's team.

The meeting is said to have marked the first occasion in which Abdullah met an Israeli prime minister since 2018, when the king met with former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Similar to the recent sitdown, it too was kept secret at first.

News of the meeting emerged just hours after Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid and Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister Ayman Safadi met at the Allenby Bridge crossing to [announce](#) the looming water deal between the two nations.

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US Court OKs Use of Electric Shock Devices on People With Mental Disabilities, Overturning FDA Ban

by [Evan Craighead](#)

In March 2020, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a federal ban on electrical stimulation devices (ESDs) used by a Massachusetts special needs school to condition students into changing behavior deemed self-injurious or aggressive. The FDA's decision followed a yearslong legal battle between the school and the state of Massachusetts.

The US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, in a 2-1 decision on Wednesday, overturned the FDA's 2020 ESD ban, virtually granting the Judge Rotenberg Educational Center allowance to resume delivering electric shocks to both child and adult students at the facility.

The [court's opinion emphasized](#) that states, rather than the federal government, have been traditionally granted the right to regulate the practice of medicine in their jurisdiction. Citing this precedent, Appeals Judges David Sentelle and Gregory Katsas argued that the FDA would have to first seek authorization from US Congress regarding the explicit conditions in which a physician can use ESDs.

"The FDA has no authority to choose what medical devices a practitioner should prescribe or administer or for which conditions," read their opinion.

The Judge Rotenberg Educational Center in Canton, Massachusetts is the only known US school still using the devices, and was explicitly named in the [FDA's self-admittedly "rare" ban](#). Prior to the 2020 federal decision, the school had been using ESDs to curb so-called "self-injurious or aggressive behavior" in their students, who have intellectual or developmental disabilities, for almost 30 years.

Over those decades, video footage has emerged showing students, some of them minors, being repeatedly shocked by electrodes attached to their skin, despite their [cries for help, or vows to change their behavior](#). In some cases, students were shocked while strapped down to a four-point board that restricted their limbs.

It is worth noting that despite the 2020 federal ban on ESDs, at least 55 individuals of the 300-person student body still received electric shocks due to a federal stay on the matter amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dissenting US Judge Suggests Application of Alternative Treatments

Chief Judge Sri Srinivasan rejected his colleagues' assertions in a dissenting opinion, arguing that the US Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act grants the FDA regulatory authority over medical devices, particularly if the public health risk is high.

"Why force the [FDA] to make an all-or-nothing choice—either abolish a highly beneficial use so it can stamp out a highly risky one, or stomach the highly risky use so it can preserve the highly beneficial one?" Srinivasan posed, casting doubt on the FDA needing congressional approval for the matter.

The dissenting judge also highlighted that, since the introduction of ESDs, a number of alternative treatments, with lower risks, have been adopted within the facility's field.

The Judge Rotenberg Educational Center, represented by attorney Michael Flammia, applauded the court's decision and asserted that electric shocks are only delivered as "a treatment of last resort" for individuals who do not respond to other treatments.

"With the treatment, these residents can continue to participate in enriching experiences, enjoy visits with their families and, most importantly, live in safety and freedom from self-injurious and aggressive behaviors," read the statement provided to [local outlet WCVB](#).

On the other hand, critics of the practice have labeled it a form of torture that can easily be abused in situations when a student is acting out, but not behaving in an aggressive, or self-injurious manner.

Shain Neumeier, an attorney who represented a number of former students, told the Boston Globe that, in reality, family members are not typically aware of the extent to which ESDs are used.

The school has claimed otherwise.

"State legislators need to end funding, if the court system is unwilling to put an end to this barbaric practice," Neumeier said.

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Stormy Daniels' Ex-Lawyer Avenatti Sentenced to 30 Months in Prison for Botched Nike Extortion Plot

by [Evan Craighead](#)

A Manhattan federal court jury unanimously ruled in March 2020 that Michael Avenatti - the attorney famous for representing adult movie actress Stormy Daniels in lawsuits against then-US President Donald Trump - was found guilty in February 2020 of defrauding a client in order to extort athletic apparel company Nike for some \$25 million.

On Thursday, US District Judge Paul Gardephe dug into Avenatti for his financial greed and criminal conduct before sentencing the [disgraced 50-year-old attorney](#) to 30 months behind bars.

"Mr. Avenatti's conduct was outrageous," Gardephe contended during the lawyer's sentencing trial in the New York City borough of Manhattan.

Avenatti's 30-month sentence was matched with another 30 months of probation.

"He hijacked his client's claims, and he used him to further his own agenda, which was to extort Nike millions of dollars for himself," Gardephe said, as [reported by CNBC](#).

US prosecutors detailed that [Avenatti's attempted shake-down](#) of the multinational athletic apparel company lasted less than a week, and began with him promising to withhold potentially damaging claims if Nike issued upwards of tens of millions of dollars in so-called legal fees, and a \$1.5 million payout for client Gary Franklin Sr., the director of a Los Angeles-based youth basketball program.

Per Avenatti's scheme, the 'legal fees' would be payment issued for an "internal investigation" of Nike led by him and high-profile criminal defense attorney Mark Geragos.

During the time, Avenatti weaponized his newfound notoriety and threatened to divulge so-called allegations of corruption during a news conference strategically scheduled one day prior to Nike's quarterly earnings call. He also claimed that Franklin was in possession of his own potentially damaging information.

After Nike refused to cough up the money, Avenatti took to Twitter to claim that corruption within the multinational company reached the "highest levels." Nike then saw a dip in stock market price.

"Nike executives were shocked," the athletic apparel company's lawyers wrote in a victim impact statement. "Nike had made a decision to not pay Mr. Avenatti, and now they were watching as he carried out what he had criminally threatened to do."

Avenatti did not make Franklin aware of his aggressive correspondence with Nike, nor his plans to pocket money received from the scheme, according to court records. Franklin detailed in his separate victim impact statement that Avenatti's covert criminal activity "devastated me financially, professionally, and emotionally."

The US district judge contended on Thursday that the 50-year-old attorney "had become drunk on the power of his platform, or what he perceived the power of his platform to be."

Gardephe's statement likely refers to Avenatti's exponential rise to fame and mainstream media bookings while representing adult film star Stormy Daniels, real name Stephanie Clifford, against Trump.

"Michael Avenatti used illegal and extortionate threats and betrayed one of his clients for the purpose of seeking to obtain millions of dollars for himself," said US Attorney Audrey [Strauss in a quoted statement](#). "Not only did Avenatti attempt to weaponize his law license and celebrity to seek to extort payments for himself, he also defrauded his own client."

"Avenatti will now serve substantial time in prison for his criminal conduct," Strauss concluded. However, that does not appear to be the case, as the 50-year-old attorney was sentenced to not even half of the [eight-year prison term recommended](#) by Probation Office officials.

According to Gardephe, Avenatti's 30-month sentence was influenced based on the fact that Avenatti, who was reportedly crying during sentencing, "expressed what I believe to be severe

remorse today." The judge also highlighted that federal prosecutors failed to charge Geragos, despite him being named as an alleged co-conspirator in the botched extortion plot.



© AP PHOTO / RICHARD VOGEL

This Friday, Sept. 2, 2016 file photo shows attorney Mark Geragos talking to the media during a news conference in downtown Los Angeles. CNN has cut ties with Mark Geragos just hours after the celebrity attorney was named as a co-conspirator in a case accusing lawyer Michael Avenatti of trying to extort Nike.

It is worth noting that as Avenatti's celebrity was growing, his expenditures and debt ballooned along with it. Prosecutors have alleged that Avenatti was blowing around \$200,000 a month, despite owing hundreds of thousands of dollars in payment to the US Internal Revenue Service. The court's lenient 30-month sentencing of Avenatti wraps just one of several fraud allegations leveled against the disgraced lawyer.

Avenatti, a resident of Venice Beach, California, is slated to appear next week in a California court to be tried on allegations that he defrauded clients - including one individual who has both paraplegia and a mental illness.

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Call the NBA: Netizens Stunned as New Photo Shows 6'7" Barron Trump Towering Over Model Mom Melania
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Barron Trump, 15, is the sole offspring of former US President Donald Trump and his third wife, former First Lady Melania Trump. Sources close to the former First Family recently revealed to People Magazine that Melania's parents maintain close proximity to her and Barron Trump because "Melania's core family is really her family."

While former US President Donald Trump mulls a possible re-entry to public office, Barron Trump, his youngest son, has reached a new height for the family -- literally.

The 15-year-old former First Son was spotted by photographers this week as he and his model mother exited Trump Tower in the Manhattan borough of New York City, New York.

Barron, estimated to be around 6 feet, 7 inches tall (>2 meters tall), and his 5-foot 11-inch tall (>1.8-meter tall) mother kept their attire simple and muted, allowing Melania's limited edition Louis Vuitton x Richard Prince tote and her sought-after Hermès Birkin bag to speak loudly.

The photo of Barron and his mother quickly went viral, with many netizens commenting on the rarely-photographed teen's apparent growth spurt.

While Barron has rarely been seen out with his half-siblings, a source reassured PEOPLE Magazine last month that the 15-year-old has been consistently surrounded by Melania's family, including her grandparents and sister.

"Melania's core family is really her family," the source said, noting that the grandparents would actively change residences along with Barron and Melania. "They are a big part of her life"

The source contended that while the grandparents are not keen on the negative attention given to their family in recent years, "they make the best of the situation."

"They have no other choice, and they have chosen to stay here and support their daughter and grandson," the source added.

book proceeds.

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Huge Majority of US Voters Approve Full Pullout From Afghanistan - Poll

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Almost three quarters of all US voters support President Joe Biden's moves to fully withdraw US combat forces from Afghanistan by the end of August, a new Hill-HarrisX poll reported on Friday.

In all, 73 percent of registered voters in the sample examined on July 2 and July 3 backed the evacuation after almost 20 years of US military operations in the Central Asian nation, The Hill reported.

The figure showed the same high levels of support for the policy as an earlier Hill-HarrisX poll conducted in April, the pollsters said.

Some 32 percent of those in favor of the pullout "strongly" supported Biden's policy while the remaining 42 percent said they "somewhat" backed it, Hill-HarrisX said.

Only 27 percent of poll responders, just over one in four, opposed the withdrawal and a mere 7 percent "strongly" opposed it, the pollsters said.

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Canadian Economy Adds 231,000 Jobs in June, Recouping Some of Spring Losses - Data

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Canadian economy gained 231,000 jobs in June, recouping some of the 275,000 jobs lost over the previous two months, the state statistics agency said on Friday.

"Employment rose by 231,000 (+1.2%) in June, following a cumulative decline of 275,000 over the previous two months," Statistics Canada said in its monthly Labor Force Survey.

The unemployment rate fell by 0.4 percent to 7.8 percent, Statistics Canada said.

The employment increase was led by part-time work - 264,000 part-time positions were added by the Canadian economy - primarily, in the accommodation and food services, and retail trade sectors, Statistics Canada said.

However, full-time employment declined by 33,000, the number of self-employed workers fell by 63,000 and the employment rate remains 1.7 below pre-pandemic levels.

Friday's job report points to the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau missing its target to restore pre-pandemic employment levels by June, Pierre Poilievre, the official opposition Conservative Party's jobs and industry critic, noted in a statement via Twitter.

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US Blacklists 34 Entities, Including 23 From China, 6 from Russia - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The US blacklisted 34 foreign entities, including 23 from China in connection to the situation in Xinjiang and six from Russia for procurement of military electronic components, according to the Commerce Department ruling to be published on Monday.

"The Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) added 34 entities to the Entity List for their involvement in, or risk of becoming involved in, activities contrary to the foreign policy and national security interests of the United States," a statement from the department read.

Most Chinese companies added to the economic blacklist "have been implicated in human rights violations and abuses in the implementation of China's campaign of repression, mass detention, and high-technology surveillance against Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other members of Muslim minority groups in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region," according to the ruling.

China routinely denies any wrongdoing.

The Russian entities found themselves on the list due to their alleged involvement in the procurement of US-made electronic components which are deemed by Washington as capable of advancing Russian military programs, according to the document.

The Commerce Department blacklisted three Russian companies, OOO Teson, OOO Trade-Component, and Radiant Group of Companies, along with three individuals, Andrey Kuznetsov, Dmitry Kravchenko, and Margarita Kuznetsova.

Other additions to the blacklist include entities from Canada, Iran, Lebanon, Netherlands, Pakistan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom.

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UN Rights Expert Urges to Classify Israeli Settlements As War Crimes

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory Michael Lynk on Friday called on the international community to designate Israeli settlements as war crimes.

"It is a tragic paradox that, while the Israeli settlements are clearly prohibited by international law, the international community has been remarkably reluctant to enforce its own laws," Lynk said in a statement.

He said the Israeli settlements violate the prohibition against the transfer by an occupying power of parts of civilian population into an occupied territory, designated as a war crime under the Rome Statute.

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US to Blacklist 30 Firms, Including 14 Chinese Linked to Situation in Xinjiang - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The United States on Friday will add more than 30 foreign companies to its economic blacklist, including 14 Chinese firms that Washington alleges are involved in human rights abuses against the Uyghur population in Xinjiang, Reuters and Bloomberg reported, citing unnamed sources.

The identity of the companies being blacklisted by the United States remains unknown, but China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said on Friday that Beijing would take all necessary actions to protect the rights and interest of its companies against any US attempts to interfere in the country's internal affairs.

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Most Vessels of US-Led Sea Breeze Drills to Remain in Black Sea for Some Time - US Navy

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The majority of the ships that joined the US-led Sea Breeze military exercise in the Black Sea will stay in the area for some time since they are also taking part in another exercise - the Bulgarian-led Breeze naval drills, US Navy Capt. Stuart Bauman said during a telephone briefing on Friday.

The 2021 edition of the annual Sea Breeze exercise kicked off in the northwestern part of the Black Sea in late June. The drills, which involve about 5,000 soldiers and 32 warships from 32 countries, are about to conclude on July 10.

"Most of the ships that have participated in Sea Breeze will also be participating in Breeze, which is a Bulgarian-led exercise, so they will be remaining in the Black Sea for a period of time, obviously not to exceed the time limits of the Montreux Convention," Bauman said.

All participating US partners have had a successful Sea Breeze and the United States is looking forward to next year's exercise, Bauman added.

The Sea Breeze exercise has been held since 1997 and involves the NATO members states and their allies in the Black Sea region. The drills are aimed at improving naval and land operations and improving cooperation among participating countries.

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New Study Explains Spiritual Basis of Orthodox Church Schism in Ukraine – Protodeacon

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - A new English-language theological study about the church schism in Ukraine will allow more Orthodox Christians to better understand the spiritual basis of

the crisis, Russian Holy Trinity Monastery in New York Protodeacon Peter Markevich told Sputnik.

Last week, Holy Trinity Publications, the publishing arm of Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York, a male monastic community of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), published an English-language translation of a book *The Ecclesial Crisis in Ukraine and its Solution According to the Sacred Canons*, written by renowned theologian from Cyprus Metropolitan Nikiforos of Kykkos and Tylliria.

"Metropolitan Nikiforos and several other bishops of that church are firm opponents of the idea of recognizing the so-called church that the Constantinople Patriarchate has had established in Ukraine. He wrote a proper theological study of the question to look past any sort of ideas of this being simply a geopolitical conflict or an old-world turf war and look at the traditions of the church, the holy canons, and specially to examine everything in the love of Christ," Markevich, a sales and marketing manager for Holy Trinity Publications, said.

The volume was originally published in the Greek language, but the monastery's publishing house found it extremely important to translate it into English, Markevich noted.

"We felt strongly, this book needed to be available in English so that more people could read the work of Metropolitan Nikiforos and come to understand the spiritual basis of the conflict," he said.

BOOK HIGHLIGHTS CONSTANTINOPLE'S INCOHERENCE

On January 6, 2019, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople handed over the Tomos of autocephaly, a document that grants Orthodox churches autonomy, to the newly established OCU. The Russian Orthodox Church, along with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UOC), refused to recognize the establishment of the new church structure in Ukraine and Constantinople's decision to grant it autocephaly.

Metropolitan Nikiforos' book reveals the incoherence in Constantinople's behavior, Father Peter said. He noted that in 2016 the Ecumenical Patriarchate stated that the UOC is the only canonical church in Ukraine.

"Everything the Ecumenical Patriarch has done since 2018 and maybe a little bit before is a complete 180-degree reversal from what the Ecumenical Throne and Patriarch Bartholomew has said in the past," the Protodeacon noted.

While the Orthodox Church is hierarchical in decision making, it is absolutely democratic in that all the bishops together must agree and come to a consensus, Markevich explained.

"We see in these actions in Ukraine a complete misunderstanding and reversal where it is not all the bishops and all the local autocephalous churches in the persons of their bishops coming together to make this decision. The Ecumenical Patriarch on its own, with no consultations and consensus, made its own choices," he said.

ROCOR DEEPLY CONNECTED TO UKRAINE

The Protodeacon highlighted a strong connection between the ROCOR, and particularly the monastery in Jordanville, New York and Ukraine. He reminded that after World War II, a large brotherhood joined the monastery from Lodomirovo (in present-day Slovakia), where a monastic community had existed as a mission of the Holy Dormition Pochaev Lavra in the now-Ukrainian city of Pochaev, while the patron of the monastic brotherhood in Jordanville and of its publishing work is St. Job of Pochaev.

In addition, in the early part of this century, he explained, the monastery's abbot Metropolitan Laurus, who was also the First Hierarch of ROCOR, had many interactions with bishops of the Russian Church, both informally and as part of official dialogues in the process of reunification with the Moscow Patriarchate. During this time he became close friends with Metropolitan Onufrii, now the primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Father Peter said.

The hierarchs spoke to each other with the same spirit - the humility, the steadfast love for the flock, and firmness in walking the path of Christ despite temptation and persecution, he added. The Moscow Patriarchate is much wider than Russia itself and represents people from all over the world, the Protodeacon noted.

"We understand that the Russian Church does not just belong to the Russian Federation. People from Ukraine, Japan, Alaska and the entire Russian diaspora could understand themselves as being inheritors of the Holy Church of Russia. These questions of nationalism or political conflict did not enter into the equation, there is no need to see oneself as needing a completely separate church," he said.

NEW BOOK SHINES LIGHT CHURCH'S ROLE IN WORLD

The new book does not just focus on the situation in Ukraine, but allows people worldwide to understand how this Body of Christ governs itself, Father Peter said.

"Many Orthodox Christians in America have a tendency to think that the Old World does not concern us, we are happy here in our parish. But as Orthodox Christians, we need to be conscious of the fact that the Orthodox Church is Universal," he said.

The current situation in Ukraine represents a "terrible example" of how such situations harm the Church's ability to exhibit and show the Love of Christ to the world, he added.

The book *The Ecclesial Crisis in Ukraine and its Solution According to the Sacred Canons* printed both in the US and the UK, and available on different digital platforms.

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IMF Board Approves Record \$650Bln Reserve Increase - Georgieva

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved the high record \$650 billion reserve increase, the fund's Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said Friday.

"The IMF Executive Board yesterday concurred in my proposal for a new general SDR [Special Drawing Rights] allocation equivalent to US\$650 billion – the largest allocation in the IMF's history – to address the long-term global needs for reserves during the worst crisis since the Great Depression," Georgieva said in a statement. "I will now present the new SDR allocation proposal to the IMF's Board of Governors for their consideration and approval. If approved, we expect the SDR allocation to be completed by the end of August."

The SDR allocation will boost the liquidity and reserves of all IMF member countries, build confidence, and foster the resilience and stability of the global economy, she added. It also will help members, particularly vulnerable states to strengthen their response to COVID-19.

"We will maintain active engagement with our membership in the months ahead to identify viable options for voluntary channeling of SDRs from wealthier members to support our poorer and more vulnerable countries to help their pandemic recovery and achieve resilient and sustainable growth, which will also help boost global economic recovery," Georgieva said. SDR allocations are distributed across the membership in proportion to IMF quota shares, the fund clarified.

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Saudi Arabia to Launch Digital News Platform as Part of Lobbying Effort in US - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Saudi Arabia will launch a digital news platform in Washington, DC, that will be a part of the new lobbying initiative targeting US lawmakers and the White House, CNBC reported citing lobbying disclosures filed with the US Justice Department.

The report said on Thursday that the digital news platform, which has not yet been formally launched, is funded by the Saudi Technology Development and Investment Co.

The report pointed out that journalists who will work for the news outlet have worked for Fox News, NBC, Al Jazeera and SiriusXM satellite radio.

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Magnitude 5.9 Earthquake Hits Central California - US Geological Survey

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - A magnitude 5.9 earthquake struck the state of California, the US Geological Survey (USGS) data revealed.

The USGS data showed that a 5.9 magnitude earthquake hit hit central California with an epicenter near the border with the state of Nevada on Thursday afternoon.

A second 4.8 magnitude earthquake hit near the California city of Stockton seconds later, the data shows.

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US Capital Settles Case With Local Church Over COVID-19 Restrictions - Court Filing

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Washington, DC city government has agreed to pay \$220,000 to the Capitol Hill Baptist Church (CHBC) to settle a lawsuit challenging

coronavirus-related restrictions that limited religious gatherings to 100 people, court documents revealed.

"The District agrees that it will not enforce any current or future COVID-19 restrictions to prohibit CHBC from gathering as one congregation in the District of Columbia. ... the District agrees to pay the two hundred twenty thousand dollars (\$220,000) (the Settlement Amount) to plaintiff's counsel," the court documents said on Thursday.

Under the settlement, the city agreed that any new restrictions on religious services due to the coronavirus would not be more restrictive than those imposed on other "comparable secular activities, as defined by the Supreme Court."

The Trump administration supported the church's lawsuit after the Washington, DC government expressed favorable treatment for political mass protests in the city during the height of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

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Egypt to Protect Its Interests with All Means Available on Dam Dispute - Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said his country will use all means available at its disposal to protect its interests if no agreement is reached on the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

"Egypt is committed to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, but at the same time, it will recognize and defend the interests of its citizens, their livelihoods with all means available and this is his disposal," Shoukry said on Thursday after the UN Security Council meeting on the GERD dispute.

Shoukry said he expected the Security Council to apply preventive diplomacy to bring Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to reaching a legally binding agreement to regulate the operation of the filling the dam with water.

Egypt has been seeking to advance an agreement with Ethiopia over the GERD to preserve its share of Nile River waters. Cairo said the GERD filling will result in water shocks, including droughts and floods.

"We look upon the Security Council to reiterate that they are supportive of the initiation of negotiations that might bring the countries to an equitable and legally binding agreement... that diffuses the potential escalation of conflict that will have dire consequences on the region and on the African continent as a whole," Shoukry stated.

Ethiopia has been implementing a large-scale project to build the dam - expected to become Africa's largest hydroelectric power plant - on the Blue Nile since 2011, but Egypt and Sudan fear its effects on their own water security.

On Monday, the Egyptian irrigation ministry said it received notification from the government of Ethiopia that it started to fill the dam, which Cairo rejects and claims is a violation of international law.

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US Air Force Selects 30 Companies to Compete For \$950Mln JADC2 Contracts - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Thirty high tech companies will compete for US Air Force contracts totaling \$950 million on open systems design, modern software and algorithm development in order to enable Joint All Domain Command and Control (JADC2) capabilities, the US Defense Department said.

"[The companies] have been awarded a ceiling \$950 million ...contract to compete for future efforts associated with the maturation, demonstration and proliferation of capability across platforms and domains, leveraging open systems design, modern software and algorithm development in order to enable JADC," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.

Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) is the Defense Department's concept to connect sensors from the US Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Space Force into a single network, according to the Congressional Research Service.

The companies include Black Sage Technologies, Clarity Innovations, Deloitte Consulting, Frontier Technology, Global Infotek, Greystones Consulting Group, Government Research Specialists, Hughes Network Systems, Hypergiant Galactic Systems, Kymeta Corporation and Mission Solutions, the release said.

Other companies include Net Vision Consultants, NXM Labs, Oracle America, PARASANTI, PLEXSYS Interface Products, Polysentry, Rackner, Research Innovations, Rolls-Royce North American Technologies, SAAB Sensis Corporation, Scientific Systems and SLICEUP, the release added.

The remaining companies are Software AG Government Solutions, Spectral Sensor Solutions, Systems & Technology Research, UMBRA LAB, XL Scientific and Yakabod Federal Solutions, according to the release.

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US, Mexico Agree to Agree to Hold Union Vote at GM Silao Plant August 20 - Trade Envoy

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and Mexico agreed that a union vote will be held for workers at General Motors' plant in the Mexican city of Silao on August 20 under the supervision of federal and international inspectors, the Office of the US Trade Representative said in a press release.

The union at the General Motors plant in Silao had reportedly violated labor rights by allegedly tampering with votes in a union election, which is prohibited under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USCMA).

"The United States and Mexico today announced a course of remediation which seeks to provide the workers of the General Motors facility in Silao, Mexico with the ability to vote on whether to approve (legitimize) their collective bargaining agreement in free and democratic conditions...As part of the course of remediation, Mexico will, among other items: ensure that a new legitimization vote is held at the facility by August 20, 2021," the release said on Thursday. The United States and Mexico also agreed Mexican federal inspectors would be present at the facility to prevent any intimidation or coercion from occurring, the release said. Moreover, the release said the two sides agreed to permit international observers from the International Labor Organization to be present before and during the vote. The United States and Mexico also agreed to investigate and sanction anyone responsible for the violation of labor rights at the plant, the release said.

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Florida Building Collapse Death Toll Reaches 64 as 4 More Bodies Recovered - Mayor

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The death toll in the Surfside, Florida, condominium building collapse has reached 64 after four more bodies were found during the ongoing recovery operation, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told reporters.

"Today, they have recovered four more victims. The total number of confirmed fatalities is now 64," Cava said during a press conference on Thursday evening.

Cava said 200 residents of the building have been accounted for and 76 are still missing.

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Dominican Republic Has No Data Any Assassins Crossed Over From Haiti - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Dominican Republic has no information that any of the perpetrators of the assassination of Haiti President Jovenel Moise have crossed over on its territory, the country's Ambassador to the United Nations Jose Blanco told reporters.

"We don't have any confirmation that neither any of the perpetrators came from the Dominican Republic or escaped to the Dominican Republic," Blanco said on Thursday. "The authorities in Haiti are working on that, and I'm sure we're going to have information on that soon."

Blanco expressed frustration that the Dominican Republic was not invited to participate in a closed meeting of the UN Security Council on the situation in Haiti held earlier on Thursday.

"Given the magnitude of events in Haiti... the Security Council should have invited our country to participate actively since the Dominican Republic would be one of the most affected if an overflow of the crisis occurs beyond its borders," Blanco said.

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US Aviation Agency Activates System to Track Space Launches, Re-Entry Vehicles - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said in a press release that it has activated a new system to track space launch and re-entry vehicles. "The US Department of Transportation's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) can now track a space launch or reentry vehicle in near-real time as it travels through the National Airspace System," the FAA said on Thursday. The FAA said this new tracking system, called the Space Data Integrator, will help manage air traffic during space operations. The tracking system became operational with the June 30 launch of the SpaceX Transponder 2 from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in the state of Florida and will be used again in the upcoming re-entry of the SpaceX CRS-22 Dragon vehicle carrying cargo from the International Space Station, which is expected to happen late Friday night. The FAA said it managed 45 space launches and re-entries in 2020, the most in the agency's history, but it expects that number could exceed 70 this year.

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Swedish Citizen Sentenced to 15 Years for \$16M in Investment Fraud - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Swedish national Roger Nils-Jonas Karlsson has been sentenced to 15 years in prison for running a multi-year investment scheme that defrauded thousands of victims for more than \$16 million, the US Justice Department said. "A Swedish man was sentenced today to 15 years in prison for securities fraud, wire fraud and money laundering charges that defrauded thousands of victims of more than \$16 million," the Justice Department said in a release on Thursday. "Roger Nils-Jonas Karlsson, 47, pleaded guilty on March 4." The authorities alleged that Karlsson acted from 2011 until his arrest in June 2019 to induce thousands of financially insecure investors to purchase shares in the scheme "Eastern Metal Securities" with cryptocurrencies while promising vast returns on investments, the release said. The defendant was also ordered to forfeit the properties acquired with funds obtained as a result of the fraud scheme, including a resort in Thailand, as the United States is seeking restitution on behalf of Karlsson's victims, the release added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik)

US POLICY ON AFGHANISTAN

- * The United States will conclude the withdrawal of its military forces from Afghanistan by August 31, but will continue to provide humanitarian and military assistance to the country, US President Joe Biden said on Thursday.
- * The United States has identified facilities outside of Afghanistan where Afghan interpreters and others who assisted the US operations in the country can stay while they await Special Immigrants Visas (SIV), Biden said.
- * Biden said that he does not trust the Taliban (banned in Russia), but he does trust the capacity of the Afghan military to deal with the security challenges in the country.

RUSSIA-AFGHANISTAN TALKS

- * Russian Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov discussed with the Taliban movement (banned in Russia) delegation the prospects for launching intra-Afghan negotiations, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Thursday.
- * A delegation from the Taliban's political office met with Kabulov, the movement's spokesman Mohammad Naeem Wardak said.

HAITI DEVELOPEMENTS

- * A US citizen is among the six suspects arrested after the assassination of Haiti President Jovenel Moise, and at least one other detainee is also believed to be a US citizen, the Washington Post reported on Thursday.
- * The US State Department said it cannot confirm that an American national is among those detained over the assassination of Haiti's President Jovenel Moise.
- * A larger group of possible assailants who took part in the killing of Moise has taken refuge in two buildings in capital Port-au-Prince and is now surrounded by the police, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Haiti Helen La Lime said.
- * The number of eliminated mercenaries suspected of assassinating Haitian President Jovenel Moise increased to seven, National Police Chief Leon Charles said.
- * Haitian First Lady Martine Moise is in stable condition in a hospital in the United States receiving treatment for wounds suffered during the attack on her husband, acting Haitian Prime Minister Claude Joseph said

LAVROV-KERRY MEETING

- * Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova confirmed the possibility of a meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry next week in Moscow.

INTERNATIONAL TALKS ON SYRIA

- * Russia, Turkey and Iran, which make up guarantor states of the Astana process on the settlement in Syria, have issued a joint statement calling for the early holding of the next round of the Syrian Constitutional Committee meetings in Geneva.
- * The Astana trio of guarantor states consisting of Russia, Iran and Turkey issued a joint statement condemning Israel's military offensives in Syria.
- * Turkey does not deserve to be the Astana format guarantor as it does not fulfill its obligations, Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Ayman Susan said.
- * Alexander Lavrentyev, the Russian president's special envoy for Syria and lead Russian negotiator at the Syria peace talks in Nur-Sultan, argued against a ceasefire in the war-torn country, saying it could hamper efforts to root out terrorism.
- * The next Astana format meeting on Syria will be held in the Kazakh capital of Nur-Sultan before the end of the year, the "Astana trio" of guarantor states consisting of Russia, Iran, and Turkey said in a joint statement.

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Blinken Says Met With Myanmar Civil Society Leaders to Discuss Crisis in Country

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement on Thursday that he met with civil society leaders from Myanmar to discuss the ongoing crisis in the country.

"Pleased to meet with Burmese civil society representatives," Blinken said via Twitter. "The United States stands in solidarity with the people of Burma as they demand restoration of their democratically elected government."

Blinken also said that the United States calls on Myanmar's military to end its violent suppression of the people in Myanmar.

On February 1, the Myanmar military overthrew the civilian government and declared a year-long state of emergency. The coup triggered mass protests, which were quashed with deadly violence, resulting in the death of over 700 people. Additionally, about 3,000 protesters were detained, according to rights activists.

In April, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations agreed on a five-point plan to resolve the crisis situation that followed on the heels of the coup. The plans includes ending violence, facilitating talks among all parties, sending aid to Myanmar, and appointing a special envoy with access to the country.

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US Charges Shooter With Gun Attack That Wounded 3 Federal Officers - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - A 28-year-old man faces charges for shooting and wounding three officers with the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) through the open window of a car he was driving in Chicago earlier this week, the US Justice Department said on Thursday.

"Two ATF agents and an ATF Task Force officer were driving in an unmarked law enforcement vehicle early Wednesday morning while participating in a federal investigation on the South Side of Chicago," Justice said in a press release.

A driver later identified as Eugene McLaurin, 28, pulled alongside the officers and began shooting through an open window earlier in the week, wounding all three officers, the release said.

McLaurin, who was arrested on Wednesday morning, was scheduled for an initial court appearance today in the afternoon, the release added.

The defendant faces one count of using a deadly weapon to assault a federal agent, a charge punishable by a maximum sentence of 20 years in a federal prison, according to the release.

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US Stocks Take Hardest Hit in 3 Weeks on Fears of Coronavirus Delta Variant Infections

NEW YORK, July 8 (Sputnik) - US stocks suffered their sharpest loss in three weeks on Tuesday after worries that the novel coronavirus Delta variant may lead to another major breakout triggered a risk-off mood across financial markets.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest US equity barometer on the New York Stock Exchange, finished at 34,422, down 260 points or 0.8 percent. The last time the Dow closed down 260 points or more in a day was on June 18. Earlier in Tuesday's session, the Dow fell as much as 535 points to an intraday low of 34,146.

The S&P 500 index, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, fell 37 points, or 0.9 percent, to close at 4,321.

The Nasdaq Composite index, which includes high-flying tech stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Netflix and Google, finished down 105 points, or 0.7 percent, at 14,560.

Some health experts have said the United States might be headed for a fall season with the Delta variant of the coronavirus likely to spark another surge of infections.

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Nine US Airline Passengers Fined \$119,000 in Total for Unruly Behavior – FAA

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – US authorities have fined nine recent airline passengers a combined total of \$119,000 for exhibiting unruly behavior on domestic flights, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) announced on Thursday

“The FAA ...levied \$119,000 in civil penalties against passengers for alleged violations of federal regulations as part of its Zero Tolerance efforts against unruly behavior,” the agency said in a press release.

The fines have been proposed as civil penalties against nine passengers ranging from \$7,500 to \$21,500 for allegedly interfering with flight attendants who instructed passengers to obey cabin crew instructions and federal regulations, the FAA explained.

“The cases involve assaulting the flight crew and other passengers, drinking alcohol brought aboard the plane and refusing to wear facemasks,” the agency said.

Since January 1, the FAA has enforcement action in 83 cases and has proposed more than \$682,000 in fines against unruly passengers, including today’s cases, the release said.

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US Supports Japan's Efforts to Hold Safe Olympics, Paralympic Games – State Department

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – The United States supports Japan's effort to conduct safe and secure Olympic and Paralympic Games later this summer, State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Thursday.

Japanese Minister of Olympic Affairs Tamayo Marukawa confirmed on Thursday that the Tokyo Olympics would not allow any spectators at all venues due to the worsening COVID-19 situation.

“We support Japan's efforts to hold safe and secure Olympic and Paralympic Games,” Price said.

The decision followed the government's declaration of a state of emergency in Tokyo from July 12 to August 22, made less than two weeks before the start of the Olympics.

The Tokyo Olympic Games, postponed from last year due to the pandemic, will kick off on July 23.

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US Sentences Avenatti to 2.5 Years in Prison for Extortion Threats to Nike - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - A federal judge has sentenced New York City lawyer Michael Avenatti to two and a half years in prison for trying to extort more than \$20 million out of the Nike Company and for defrauding his own client, the US Department of Justice said on Thursday.

"Audrey Strauss, the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that Michael Avenatti was sentenced today in Manhattan federal court by United States District Judge Paul Gardephe to 30 months in prison for attempting to extort Nike and for defrauding a client," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Avenatti was previously found guilty on February 14, 2020, following a three-week jury trial. He had demanded to be paid between \$15 million and \$25 million by the company as a retainer or get a total payment from it of \$22.5 million to resolve any claims his client might have and to buy his silence, the release said.

"Michael Avenatti used illegal and extortionate threats and betrayed one of his clients for the purpose of seeking to obtain millions of dollars for himself. Not only did Avenatti attempt to weaponize his law license and celebrity to seek to extort payments for himself, he also defrauded his own client," the release also said.

According to the complaint, superseding indictment, court documents and evidence presented at trial, Avenatti used threats of economic and reputational harm to seek to extort Nike while defrauding his client and had threatened to hold a press conference on the eve of Nike's quarterly earnings call at which he would announce allegations of misconduct by employees of the company, the release added.

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Hyundai, Kia Partner With Canadian Firm to Make Cost-Effective, Clean Hydrogen

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – The Canadian energy company Next Hydrogen entered into a partnership with Hyundai and Kia to develop a system to produce hydrogen cheaply enough for widespread commercial use, the Korean auto firms said on Thursday.

"Under the agreement, the companies will jointly develop an alkaline water electrolysis system and its related stack for the purpose of generating green hydrogen economically," a joint Hyundai-Kia press release said.

The prospect of an economy powered by hydrogen offers a potential solution to climate change because used hydrogen produces water vapor as a by-product instead of carbon dioxide emitted by fossil fuels.

The release emphasized that existing technologies remain too costly for most commercial uses such as vehicle fuel.

Among the various methods of water electrolysis, the alkaline water system is regarded as technologically one of the most rigorously tested and proven means with a long track record of research and development, the release said.

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Russia Will Not Support 1-Year Extension of Cross-Border Aid into Syria - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - Russia will not support the extension for 12 months of the cross-border humanitarian aid delivery mechanism into Syria as the UN Security Council prepares to vote on the issue on Friday, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia told reporters on Thursday.

Norway and Ireland had submitted a draft resolution to extend the mechanism, which is due to expire July 10, for one year using two crossings from Turkey and Iraq.

"Twelve months [do not play]," Nebenzia said when asked whether Russia intends to use the veto power as the permanent member of the Security Council during the Friday vote on the resolution.

Nebenzia also confirmed Russia had introduced its own draft seeking to extend the mechanism for six months through one crossing.

The mechanism, authorized in 2014, initially used four crossing points to bring aid into northwestern Syria. Russia and China previously used their veto power to block resolutions extending the mechanism as it was, and the number of crossings was eventually reduced to only one from Turkey.

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US Responding to Request from Haiti Police for Help Probing Assassination - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is in the process of responding to a request from Haiti's national police for help in probing the assassination of late President Jovenel Moise, State Department Press Secretary Ned Price told reporters on Thursday. "We are aware of the Haitian National police's request for investigative assistance and the United States is responding," Price said.

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Trudeau Says Unvaccinated Visitors Will Not Be Allowed to Come to Canada for 'a While'

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – Ottawa will not allow unvaccinated international travelers entry into Canada for the foreseeable future, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday. "You did mention wondering when unvaccinated tourists can start coming to Canada, I can tell you right now that's not going to happen for quite a while," Trudeau said in response to a reporter's questions during a press briefing.

The Prime Minister noted that the safety of Canadians remains the top priority, saying the federal government will not "jeopardize" the progress made in fighting the pandemic by reopening borders too quickly.

Canadian officials are considering a range of measures Ottawa can implement to facilitate travel for fully vaccinated international travelers, Trudeau added, saying he hopes to have an announcement ready in the coming weeks.

Canadian officials had previously tied relaxed restrictions at the border to having at least 75 percent of residents partially vaccinated and 20 percent fully vaccinated. In recent weeks, however, Trudeau and the country's health officials have indicated a desire to see vaccination rates exceed 80 percent before relaxing constraints.

International travelers, including Americans, have been barred from entering Canada since March 2020, and Ottawa recently extended the border restrictions that limit so-called non-essential travel to and from the United States through July 21.

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US Navy \$172M In Contract Launches Production of Mid-Band Signal Jammer - Raytheon

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The first production lot of a mid-range signal jammer will begin with award of a \$171.6 million US Navy Contract, Raytheon announced on Thursday. "With its power and ability to jam multiple radars simultaneously, NGJ-MB [Next Generation Jammer Mid-Band] will fundamentally change the way the Navy conducts airborne electronic attack," Raytheon Vice President of Electronic Warfare Systems Annabel Flores said in a press release.

NGJ-MB is the Navy's advanced electronic attack system that offensively denies, disrupts and degrades enemy technology, including air-defense systems and communications, the release said.

The system uses the latest digital, software-based and Active Electronically Scanned Array technologies, which allows operators to non-kinetically attack significantly more targets and at greater distances than with existing countermeasures, the release also said.

The \$171.6 million contract award follows last week's decision to advance the program into the production and deployment phase, the release added.

NGJ-MB previously completed more than 145 hours of developmental flight-testing, plus over 3,100 hours of lab testing at naval bases in the US states of California and Maryland, according to the release.

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State Dept. Cannot Confirm US Citizen Among Detained Over Haiti President's Assassination

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – The US State Department said on Thursday it cannot confirm that an American national is among those detained over the assassination of Haiti's President Jovenel Moise.

"I am not in a position to confirm that because the Haitian authorities, of course, are leading this investigation," State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters. "It is still early days, we are aware of the reports of the arrests that have taken place, but I would need to refer to the Haitian authorities for any details."

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Pentagon Sees Latest Rocket Attacks Against US Forces in Iraq as 'Serious Threat'

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department views the latest rocket and drone attacks against US interests in Iraq as a serious threat, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said on Thursday.

"These attacks, they're using lethal weaponry. I don't know how you can say anything other than it's a serious threat," Kirby said when asked how threatening the latest rocket and drone attacks are in Iraq.

Earlier this week, two members of the US military were injured after 14 rockets were fired at Ain Al-Assad Air Base, which hosts Coalition troops in Iraq.

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North Dakota Sues US Federal Govt for Lost Oil Leases, Revenue - State AG

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Republican-run state of North Dakota is suing the US federal government for canceling oil and gas lease auctions that have already cost it some \$80 million in revenue and potentially billions of dollars in the future, State Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem said on Thursday.

"I have taken this action to protect North Dakota's economy, the jobs of our hard-working citizens, and North Dakota's rights to control its own natural resources," Stenehjem said in a statement.

North Dakota is the second-largest oil-producing state in the country. The cancellation of its March and June oil drilling auctions by the federal government's Bureau of Land Management and Department of the Interior will cost over \$80 million in lost revenues "that could grow into billions in the coming months," the statement added.

The North Dakota action follows a ruling by a federal judge in Louisiana who last month froze the Biden administration's pause on oil and gas leasing on public lands and waters.

That judge's order granted a preliminary injunction to Louisiana and 12 other states that sued Democratic President Biden and the Interior Department over the leasing freeze, a key element of the White House's effort to address climate change.

"I welcome and support the Louisiana federal district court's decision, and I look forward to defending North Dakota's vital interests in its natural resources and continuing to put the pressure on the Federal government to do the right thing for our state," Stenehjem said. Democratic lawmakers aligned to President Joe Biden voted in the House of Representatives on June 25 to get rid of his predecessor Donald Trump's liberal emission ruling on the methane greenhouse gas that they said was destructive to the environment. Twelve rival House Republicans from Trump's party joined Democrats in that vote.

The Trump-era regulation rescinded standards aimed at limiting methane emissions from oil and gas production, processing, transmission and storage. The Trump rule also abolished limits for substances called volatile organic compounds from oil and gas transmission and storage.

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US Not Responsible for Civilian Losses if Afghanistan Descends Into Civil War - Biden

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The United States will not be responsible for the loss of civilian lives in case Afghanistan descends into civil war, President Joe Biden said during a press briefing on Thursday.

"No, no, no," Biden said in replying to a question about whether the United States will be held responsible for the potential loss of civilian life in Afghanistan if the situation there descends into civil war.

Biden added that it is up to the people of Afghanistan to decide the form of government they will have.

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US Crude Stockpiles Tumble 7th Week in Row Amid Summer Fuel Demand - Energy Agency

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US crude oil inventories plummeted for a seventh week in a row, drawing more than 40 million barrels combined, on summer demand for fuels amid strong economic recovery, data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA) revealed on Thursday.

Stockpiles of crude in the United States - the world's largest oil consuming country - fell by 6.87 million barrels last week, the data showed.

Industry analysts polled by US media had anticipated a drawdown of just about 4 million barrels for crude during the week that ended on July 2.

Crude inventories have fallen without a break each week since May 17, totaling 40.5 million barrels or averaging 5.8 million barrels per week.

The big draw came as US refiners focus on pushing out as much gasoline as they can for this summer to meet projected demand. According to the EIA, refiners operated last week at 92.2 percent of capacity - levels last seen in the summer of 2019.

Stockpiles of gasoline fell by 6.1 million barrels last week, versus forecasts for a drawdown of 1.8 million barrels, demonstrating the stepped-up refining activity.

Inventories of distillates, that include diesel and heating oil, rose by 1.6 million barrels, forming the only bearish component in the EIA data set. Analysts had forecast a build of just 150,000 barrels here.

The surge in fuel demand has led to a sharp appreciation in both futures prices of US crude as well as gasoline prices at pump stations in the United States.

US crude futures traded just two cents shy of \$77 per barrel on Monday, reaching peaks not seen since November 2014. Gasoline prices at the pump stations are also at near seven-year highs of above \$3 per gallon.

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US to Keep Diplomatic Presence, Secure Airport and Pursue Peace in Afghanistan - Biden

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The US intends on maintaining a diplomatic presence, securing the international airport and pursuing peace in Afghanistan following their withdrawal from the country, President Joe Biden said on Thursday.

"I intend to maintain our diplomatic presence in Afghanistan and we are coordinating closely with our international partners in order to continue to secure the international airport, and we're going to engage in a determined diplomacy to pursue peace and a peace agreement that will end this senseless violence," Biden said during a speech about the Afghan retrograde.

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Biden Says Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan Not Inevitable

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that it is not inevitable that the Taliban will take over Afghanistan following the US withdrawal from the country.

When asked whether a Taliban takeover of Afghanistan now inevitable, Biden replied "No."

"It is not, because you have the Afghan troops at 300,000 well-equipped as well as good as any army in the world and their Air Force against something like 75,000 Taliban," he added. "It is not inevitable."

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Trudeau Says Unvaccinated Visitors Will Not Be Allowed to Come to Canada for 'a While'

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – Ottawa will not allow unvaccinated international travelers entry into Canada for the foreseeable future, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday. “You did mention wondering when unvaccinated tourists can start coming to Canada, I can tell you right now that’s not going to happen for quite a while,” Trudeau said in response to reporter’s questions during a press briefing.

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Biden Says Does Not Trust Taliban But Trusts Capacity of Afghan Military to Conduct War

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that he does not trust the Taliban (banned in Russia), but he does trust the capacity of the Afghan military to deal with the security challenges in the country. “I do not trust the Taliban,” Biden said. “But I trust the capacity of the Afghan military, which is better trained, better equipped and more competent in terms of conducting war.”

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US Identifies Facilities to Hold Afghan Allies, Will Begin Relocation Flights Soon - Biden

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The US has identified facilities outside of Afghanistan where Afghan interpreters and other allies of American operations in the country can stay while they await Special Immigrants Visas (SIV) and will begin relocation flights this month, President Joe Biden said on Thursday.

“The operation has identified US facilities outside the continental US as well as in third countries to host our Afghan allies if they so choose. And starting this month, we’re going to begin relocation flights for Afghanistan SIV applicants and their families who choose to leave,” Biden said during remarks about the drawdown of US forces from the country.

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Biden Says 'Not True' That US Intel Community Assesses That Afghan Govt Will Collapse

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden refuted reports on Thursday that the US intelligence community assessed that the Afghan government will collapse.

"That is not true," Biden stated during remarks about the drawdown of US forces from the country. "They did not reach that conclusion... They [Afghan government] clearly have the capacity to sustain the government in place."

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Biden Says Taliban 'At its Strongest' Militarily Since 2001

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Taliban (banned in Russia) is at its strongest point since the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, US President Joe Biden said on Thursday.

"The Taliban is at its strongest militarily since 2001," Biden said during remarks on the ongoing US military withdrawal from Afghanistan.

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US To Continue to Provide Humanitarian, Military Help to Afghanistan After Pullout - Biden

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to provide humanitarian and military assistance to Afghanistan following the withdrawal of its troops, President Joe Biden said on Thursday.

"We provided advanced weaponry and we're going to continue to provide funding and equipment [to Afghanistan] ... We will continue to provide civilian and humanitarian assistance, including speaking out for the rights of women and girls," he said.

He added that Washington plans to keep a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, as well as secure Kabul international airport and pursue a peace agreement to end violence.

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Biden Says US Military to Conclude Withdrawal From Afghanistan By August 31

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The United States will conclude the withdrawal of its military from Afghanistan by August 31, US President Joe Biden said on Thursday at a briefing.

"Our military mission in Afghanistan will conclude on August 31," Biden said. "And thanks to the way in which we've managed our withdrawal, no one in US forces or any other forces have been lost."

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Record Breaking US Heat Wave 'Impossible Before Climate Change' - World Weather Body

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The record-breaking heat wave that swept the northwestern United States recently would have been impossible before the arrival of global climate change generated by excessive carbon emissions and other human activities, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said on Thursday.

"The record-breaking heatwave in parts of the US and Canada at the end of June would have been virtually impossible without the influence of human-caused climate change," the WMO said in a press release. "Climate change, caused by greenhouse gas emissions, made the heatwave at least 150 times more likely to happen."

Pacific Northwest areas of the US and Canada saw temperatures that broke records by several degrees, including a new all-time Canadian temperature record of 49.6 degrees Celsius (121.3 degrees Fahrenheit) - well above the previous national record of 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit), the WMO said.

"Every heatwave occurring today is made more likely and more intense by climate change. ... The extreme temperatures experienced were far outside the range of past observed temperatures," the WMO said.

North America had its warmest June on record, according to the monthly bulletin from Copernicus Climate Change Service, the WMO said. Until overall greenhouse gas emissions are halted, global temperatures will continue to increase and events like these will become more frequent, it added.

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Haiti Requests from UN Additional Security Assistance After Assassination - Special Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - Haiti has requested the United Nations to provide additional security assistance after the killing of President Jovenel Moise, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General Helen La Lime said in a press briefing on Thursday. Earlier in the day, the UN Security Council held a closed emergency meeting to discuss the situation in Haiti after Moise's assassination.

"What we talked about in the Security Council was that Haiti is making a request for security and additional security assistance, that we should be looking at this assistance," La Lime said when asked whether the deployment of UN peacekeepers was discussed during the Security Council meeting.

"Haiti needs to specify exactly what it is that they're after," La Lime added.

The United Nations ended its peacekeeping presence in Haiti in 2017 and two years later it wrapped up the follow-up UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti.

La Lime also said the Haitian ambassador to the United Nations had asked for international assistance to investigate Moise's assassination.

"It is important that these requests be taken seriously. We certainly are prepared as BINUH [United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti] with the expertise that we have on board to assist this investigation and to call for further expertise as necessary," she said.

Moise was shot dead in his private residence on Wednesday morning and his wife was injured in the attack. Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik on Wednesday that the assailants are most likely foreign mercenaries.

Six individuals involved in Moise's assassination have been arrested so far and another four have been killed. According to La Lime, a large group of the assailants is taking refuge in two buildings in Port-au-Prince and are surrounded by police.

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Russia Submits UNSC Draft to Extend Syria's Cross-Border Mechanism for 6 Months - Source

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - Russia has introduced a resolution at the UN Security Council to extend Syria's cross-border mechanism for at least six months to be able to deliver aid via one border crossing, a diplomatic source at the United Nations told Sputnik on Thursday. Norway and Ireland introduced a resolution earlier to extend the mechanism for a year through two crossing points from Turkey and Iraq.

"Russia introduced its own resolution on Syria's cross-border mechanism extending one crossing for six months with a possibility of further extension after a Secretary-General's report and analysis," the source said. "The draft also includes the support for cross-line deliveries [from within Syria] and help to Syria to overcome the COVID-19 crisis."

The source said the voting on the draft resolution will take place on Friday.

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Symptoms of Post-COVID-19 Patients in Rehab Top Those of Cancer Survivors - Report

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Recovered COVID-19 patients who enter rehabilitation due to recurring health woes experienced symptoms more severe than those of cancer survivors, the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a report on Thursday.

"Compared with control patients enrolled in a cancer rehabilitation program, adult post-COVID-19 patients referred for rehabilitation services reported poorer physical health and being less able to engage in physical activities and activities of daily living," the report said.

Although most patients infected with the coronavirus recover within a few weeks, some experience lingering post-COVID-19 conditions, the report said.

Using data from outpatient rehabilitation clinics in the US state of Pennsylvania from January 2020 to March 2021, CDC compared measures of health, physical endurance, and healthcare use between the two cohorts, the report said.

Post-COVID-19 patients were more likely than cancer survivors to have received a diagnosis of generalized muscle weakness or fatigue (72.7 percent versus 42.3 percent) and patient-reported symptoms of generalized muscle weakness, malaise, and fatigue (69.0 percent versus 59.7 percent), the report added.

Post-COVID-19 patients also reported a higher prevalence of fair or poor overall mental health than control patients (19.1 percent versus 15.3 percent), according to the report.

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US Stands Ready to Support Haitian Probe of President Moise Assassination - White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The US government stands ready to lend its support to the Haiti authorities in the investigation of the assassination of President Jovenel Moise, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Thursday.

"The Haitian authorities are of course leading the investigation, which is of course in its early stages. We're ready and willing to support Haitian authorities, but we're going to let the investigation play out," Psaki said during a press conference.

Moise was shot dead in his private residence on Wednesday morning and his wife was injured in the attack. Haitian Ambassador to the United States Bocchit Edmond told Sputnik on Wednesday that the assailants are most likely foreign mercenaries.

Six individuals involved in Moise's assassination have so far been arrested and another four have been killed. A UN Special Representative to Haiti said earlier on Thursday that a large group of the assailants are taking refuge in two buildings in Port-au-Prince and are surrounded by police.

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US to Fly Afghan Interpreters to Other Locations Outside Country in August - White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will fly Afghan interpreters to third countries in August where they can wait until their special immigrant visas are approved, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Thursday.

Afghan interpreters are facing threats from the Taliban movement for helping US and NATO forces throughout the last 20 years of the war in Afghanistan.

"We have stood up an operation to physically relocate thousands of these Afghans and their families before the US military mission concludes so that they can wait safely outside of Afghanistan," Psaki said during a press briefing. "I can confirm that we will be conducting flights of our Afghan allies to these locations in August."

Psaki did not disclose an exact number of how many Afghan interpreters would be relocated to another country or granted an opportunity to resettle in the United States.

The Biden administration is working closely with Congress to expedite the process for approving the special immigrant visas for Afghan interpreters, Psaki said.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said in June that Lithuania is granting asylum to Afghan interpreters who worked for its military in Afghanistan amid concerns for their safety after NATO's withdrawal. Canada is also working to resettle Afghan interpreters in the country before foreign forces completely withdraw from Afghanistan.

The departure of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan, scheduled to be completed by September 11, has been met with a surge in violence, with dozens of districts in Afghanistan's rural north falling to the Taliban movement in the past weeks.

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US Citizen Among Those Arrested for Assassination of Haitian President – Report

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – A US citizen is among six suspects arrested during the ongoing police operation in Haiti following the assassination of the President Jovenel Moise, and at least one other detainee is also believed to be an American, the Washington Post reported on Thursday, citing Haiti's minister of elections and inter-party relations.

James Solages, an American national of Haitian descent, was arrested on Thursday along with five other suspects in the killing of Moise, while four more alleged assassins were killed by police, the report said.

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Biden Administration Has Been in Contact With Acting Prime Minister of Haiti - White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The administration of President Joe Biden has been in contact with Haiti's acting prime minister Claude Joseph amid the situation following the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters on Thursday.

"We have been in touch with the acting prime minister of Haiti," Psaki said during a press briefing.

On Wednesday morning, Moise was assassinated at his home near the capital of Port-au-Prince by unidentified gunmen. Haitian authorities placed the country under a state of siege and later said they had killed four people involved in the assassination and detained several others.

Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world, has been experiencing social, political and constitutional crises, with protesters blaming Moise for targeted killings, widespread corruption and an economic collapse.

The opposition has said it believes Moise's five-year term should have ended in February 2021, five years after his predecessor Michel Martelly stepped down, but Moise insisted he had an additional year to serve, a position backed by the Organization of American States.

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US to Ship 500,000 Vaccine Doses to Uruguay, 1.4Mln Doses to Afghanistan - White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The United States will ship some 500,000 doses of Pfizer coronavirus vaccine to Uruguay and 1.4 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson coronavirus vaccine to Afghanistan, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Thursday.

"We will ship 500,000 Pfizer vaccine doses to Uruguay and we will ship 1.4 million doses of Johnson & Johnson vaccine to Afghanistan, Psaki said during a press briefing.

The move is part of the Biden administration's commitment to share 80 million doses with countries around the world. The US government allocates the vaccines on the basis of availability and whether countries are ready to receive and administer them.

On Wednesday, the Biden administration announced that 1 million doses of the coronavirus vaccines will be delivered to Bolivia and Paraguay. Guatemala and Vietnam received a combined 3.5 million doses of the Moderna vaccines on Tuesday and 4 million doses of the Moderna vaccine were sent to Indonesia late last week.

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US Allocates Over \$15Mln For Research Projects on Cloud-Climate Change Link - Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – Twenty-seven studies on the interaction between atmospheric aerosols and clouds will receive research grants totaling more than \$15 million in an examination of processes behind climate change, the Department of Energy (DOE) said on Thursday.

"These projects will help scientists better understand one of the most challenging aspects of Earth system modeling and improve their ability to accurately predict weather and climate patterns - an essential tool in the Biden Administration's efforts to combat the climate emergency," DOE said in a press release.

Researchers will use data gathered by DOE's Atmospheric Radiation Measurement user facility, the world's leading facility for ground-based observations of atmospheric processes. Funding totaling \$15.6 million will support the projects for the next three years, the release said.

Research will cover a range of atmospheric science topics, including the physical interactions between clouds and aerosols, lifecycles of thunderstorms, and surface energy distribution in the Arctic region, the release added.

Aerosols are tiny particles that take on water and absorb and scatter light, which alters how readily the atmosphere forms clouds. Clouds, in turn, modify aerosols by changing their chemistry, the release explained.

These processes - some of the most complex interactions to model - affect temperature, precipitation patterns, and how much sunlight reaches and leaves the Earth's surface, making them critical in producing accurate climate predictions, according to the release.

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Maintaining US Forces in Afghanistan Would Have Resulted in Violence With Taliban - Psaki

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Taliban would launched attacks against US and allied forces in Afghanistan had US president Joe Biden not decided to withdraw from the country, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Thursday.

"There would have been significant consequences had we chosen not to bring our troops home. In April, if he'd instead announced that the United States was going back on this agreement made, the US and allied forces remaining in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future, the Taliban would've began targeting our forces," Psaki said during a news conference.

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White House Still Assessing Whether US First Lady Will Attend Tokyo Olympics

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The White House is still assessing whether First Lady Jill Biden will attend the Olympics in Tokyo this summer, Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Thursday.

"We are still assessing the feasibility of the First Lady attending and our advance team arrives in Tokyo later this week," Psaki said during a press briefing.

Psaki said President Joe Biden supports the health measures put in place in Tokyo because they are necessary to properly host the Olympics.

Earlier on Thursday, Minister of Olympic Affairs Tamayo Marukawa confirmed that the authorities would not allow any spectators at all venues due to the coronavirus situation.

The Tokyo Olympics is scheduled to start on July 23.

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Group of Suspected Assassins of Haiti's President Surrounded by Police - Special UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - A larger group of possible assailants that took part in the killing of Haitian President Jovenel Moise has taken refuge in two buildings in capital Port-au-Prince and is now surrounded by the police, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Haiti Helen La Lime said in a press briefing on Thursday.

Earlier, it was reported that four members of the group that took part in Moise's killing were killed, and another six people were arrested.

"I'm also aware that a larger group of possible perpetrators have taken refuge in two buildings in the city, and they are now surrounded by the police," La Lime said.

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US Will Act Against Perpetrators of Ransomware Attack if Russia Does Not - White House

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The US government has been in touch with the Russian authorities regarding the latest ransomware attack and has let them know that if they do not act against the responsible actors in Russia the United States will act, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters on Thursday.

"He [Biden] is continuing to be updated by his team on a regular and nearly daily basis," Psaki said. "We are continuing to gather details on if this incident occurred with the knowledge or approval of the Russian government ... We've been in touch at a high level as you all know with high-level Russian authorities, counterparts I should say, regarding this incident and we've continued to send a clear message - if the Russian government cannot or will not act against criminal actors residing in Russia, we will act."

Psaki noted that while the intelligence community has not yet attributed the attack and they still do not have new information on the attribution as of today, but also said the cybersecurity community agrees the criminal group involved in the cyberattack is in Russia and has affiliates around the world.

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UN Envoy to Haiti Says Number of Arrests Made, Police Working Hard to Arrest Commando

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti, Helen La Lime, said on Thursday a number of arrests have been made and the police are exerting efforts to arrest the commando who assassinated Haitian President Jovenel Moise.

"A number of arrests have been made as the police are working very hard to arrest the commando that entered the compound and attacked the President and the First Lady," La Lime

said. "What I have now is that in the last 12 hours, the four members of the group that raided the presidential residence have been killed by the police, while another six are now in police custody," she added.

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First Nation Chief Says Catholic Church to Share Documents on Canadian Unmarked Gravesite

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – The Roman Catholic Church and its representatives in Canada have assured an indigenous community that they will provide documentation to help identify the remains of 751 victims located in an unmarked gravesite, Cowessess First Nation Chief Cadmus Delorme told Sputnik.

Last month, following a scan with ground-penetrating radar, Cowessess First Nation uncovered 751 unmarked graves on the site of a former residential school where indigenous children were forcibly sent to be stripped of their heritage and assimilated into European Canadian society.

"We have been in communication with the Archdiocese of Canada, the regional archdiocese. We have also been in contact with the Roman Catholic Church, and every one of them have informed us they stand beside us and will be helping with ensuring we get our information," Delorme said in an interview with Sputnik.

Delorme confirmed that the current tally of unmarked gravesites at the site of the former Marieval Indian Residential School remains at 751. Saskatchewan Polytechnic, the post-secondary institution which undertook the study had previously told the First Nation that the margin of error is 10%.

The chief of Cowessess First Nation, which is located two hours east of Regina, the capital of the province of Saskatchewan, also shed light on the next steps in the fact-finding mission. According to Delorme, a research team has been assembled to ascribe identities to each of the unmarked graves and in the next phase of the mission, Cowessess First Nation hopes to identify victims buried at another gravesite.

During a press briefing on June 24, Delorme suggested there are likely additional unmarked gravesites, as only those baptized by the Roman Catholic were buried at the site under investigation, while remaining victims were buried at a different location.

Delorme said the community is aware of the general vicinity of the remaining burial sites, however, this second phase of the investigation remains "a ways away" from commencement. According to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, released in 2015, roughly 150,000 aboriginal children were forcibly assimilated through the residential schools from 1883 to 1998, in a process equated to "cultural genocide."

The report discovered that around 3,200 died in the schools, with the greatest number of deaths taking place before 1940. Schools also had high rates of tuberculosis and other health incidences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with death rates remaining high until the 1950s.

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UN Envoy Says Haiti Facing 'Very Serious' Situation After President's Assassination

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - The situation in Haiti remains very serious after the killing of the nation's President Jovenel Moise, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Haiti, Helen La Lime, said in a press briefing on Thursday.

"We are facing a very serious situation in the country right now, President Jovenel Moise was assassinated in a cowardly way," La Lime said after participating in a closed emergency UN Security Council meeting on Moise's assassination that took place on Wednesday.

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New York Shuts Down Purdue Pharma to Combat Opioid Crisis in \$4.5Bln Settlement - AG

NEW YORK CITY, July 8 (Sputnik) – New York Attorney General Letitia James has helped shut down Purdue Pharma for its role in fueling the opioid drug crisis and obtained a settlement of more than \$4.5 billion from the Sackler family that ran the firm, her office announced on Thursday.

"The agreement will, first and foremost, shut down Purdue Pharma and end the Sackler family's ability to manufacture opioids ever again," a statement from the New York State Office of the Attorney General said. "The agreement will also deliver one of the largest payments that individuals and entities they control have paid to resolve a law enforcement action in U.S. history — more than \$4.5 billion will be paid to fund prevention, treatment, and recovery programs in communities across the country."

In the statement, Attorney General James said under the terms of the settlement with Purdue, the company will make public tens of millions of documents related to the company and the Sackler family's roles in igniting the opioid crisis — a move that she said would lead to "unprecedented disclosure about the role Purdue and the Sacklers played in hooking Americans on opioids".

"For nearly two years, since Purdue Pharma declared bankruptcy, the company and the Sackler family have used every delay tactic possible and misused the courts — all in an effort to shield their misconduct," James said. "While no amount of money will ever compensate for the thousands who lost their lives or became addicted to opioids across our state or provide solace to the countless families torn apart by this crisis, these funds will be used to prevent any future devastation."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the number of drug overdose deaths in the United States rose by nearly 5 percent from 2018 to 2019 and quadrupled since 1991. Over 70 percent of the 70,630 deaths in 2019 involved an opioid, the CDC says.

According to health experts, opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers available legally by prescription, such as oxycodone hydrocodone, codeine, morphine, and many others. Opioid pain relievers are generally safe when taken for a short time and as prescribed by a doctor, but because they produce euphoria in addition to pain relief, they are addictive and can be misused.

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Prevalence of COVID-19 Delta Variant in US Surpasses 50% This Week, Up From 26% – CDC

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – The prevalence of the more transmissible Delta variant of COVID-19 in the US has exceeded the 50% mark this week, up from 26 percent a week before, while cases and hospitalizations have been increasing over the past few days, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said on Thursday. "The Delta variant is spreading rapidly throughout the country. This week, the Delta variant is estimated to be the most prevalent variant in the United States, representing over 50 percent of sequenced samples across the country up from 26 percent from the week ending June 19," Walensky said at a briefing.

The new CDC data showed that over the last seven days, both the number of new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations have been on a rise, with about 14,000 cases and 2000 hospitalizations per day, Walensky said.

The CDC Director also noted that the Delta variant is currently raging in parts of the United States with low vaccination rates with a total of 173 counties in the US that have case rates greater than or equal to 100 cases per 100,000 people.

The Delta strain was first registered in India and is believed to be the fastest spreading and most contagious coronavirus variant, according to reports.

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UNSC Not Considering Sending Peacekeepers to Haiti 'At This Stage' - Norwegian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council does not currently consider deploying UN peacekeepers again into Haiti in the wake of the killing of the nation's President Jovenel Moise, Norwegian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mona Juul told reporters on Thursday.

On early Wednesday morning, Moise was assassinated at his home near the capital of Port-au-Prince by unidentified gunmen. The Haitian authorities placed the country under a state of siege and later said they had killed four people involved in the assassination.

"We are not at this stage," Juul said when asked whether the council was examining the option of bringing Blue Helmets back to Haiti.

The UN Security Council first authorized the deployment of some 7,000 UN peacekeeping forces into Haiti after the 2004 coup d'etat that the body decided represented a threat to international peace and security.

In October 2010, a few months after a catastrophic earthquake devastated Haiti, the country declared its first-ever in a modern history Cholera outbreak. The government reported over 800,000 cases and some 10,000 deaths since the outbreak began.

The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) is believed to import the disease into the island nation. The UN panel of independent experts concluded that UN troops from Nepal were most likely the cause of the Cholera outbreak in Haiti.

In addition, several Haitians have spoken of accounts of sexual misconduct, including the rape of minors, by UN peacekeepers.

In 2017, the UN Security Council decided to end the MINUSTAH, leaving a controversial legacy of the UN troops' presence in Haiti.

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UNICEF, Janssen Sign First COVID-19 on Vaccine Supplies for African Union - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The UN Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) said that it has signed a deal with Janssen Pharmaceutica to provide 220 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) coronavirus vaccine for all member states in the African Union.

"UNICEF has signed an agreement with Janssen Pharmaceutica NV to supply up to 220 million doses of the J&J single-dose vaccine for all 55 Member States of the African Union (AU) by the end of 2022," the Paris-based body said in a news release. "Some 35 million doses are to be delivered by the end of this year."

The deal will help implement the Advance Purchase Commitment signed between the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust (AVAT) and Janssen in March, UNICEF said. The AU set up AVAT in November 2020 to deliver COVID-19 vaccines to inoculate 60 percent of each AU country's population, it said.

"Vaccine access has been unequal and unfair, with less than 1 percent of the population of the African continent currently vaccinated against COVID-19. This cannot continue," UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore said in the release.

Under the plan, the African Export-Import Bank and AVAT have signed a cooperation agreement on behalf of the AU to create an APC Framework to support member states' access to COVID-19 vaccines, the release said.

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Boeing Wins \$321.6Mln Contract With UK to Service Aircraft Fleet, Train Pilots

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – UK Royal Air Force (RAF) pilots who fly the nation's fleet of P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft will receive training under a \$321.6 million contract announced by Boeing on Thursday.

"This contract with Boeing Defense UK secures our critical submarine-hunting aircraft capabilities whilst also creating a home-grown training enterprise and creating over 150 British jobs," UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said in a press release issued by Boeing.

Boeing will provide maintenance services, spares and repairs, including tools and ground support equipment, as well as supply chain management, forecasting and inventory management, and airworthiness services for the RAF's P-8 fleet, the release said.

The RAF has contracted for nine Poseidon aircraft with five already delivered and the remaining four scheduled for later this year, the release added.

In addition, the second of two operational training aircraft, jointly developed by Boeing and UK defense company CAE, arrived at the RAF Lossiemouth base in Scotland last month, according to the release.

The contract is expected to create 150 jobs in addition to about 2,500 Boeing workers now employed in the UK, the release said.

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Number of Children Facing Malnutrition in CAR Increases by Nearly Third - UN Agencies

UNITED NATIONS, July 8 (Sputnik) - The number of children at risk of severe malnutrition in the Central African Republic (CAR) has increased by nearly a third over previous projections, the Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and World Food Program (WFP) said on Thursday.

"At least 80,000 children under the age of five are currently at risk of severe acute malnutrition across the Central African Republic (CAR) - a 29 percent increase compared to projections for 2021," UNICEF and WFP said in a release. "Over 632,000 people - more than one in eight people - will fall into a catastrophic hunger situation between the first week of July and the end of the lean season without urgent action."

UNICEF and WFP also said that 40 percent of children under the age of five already suffer from chronic malnutrition.

Malnutrition rates in CAR have soared since violence erupted in the country after the general election in December. Opponents of Faustin Archange Touadera, who won the presidential vote, accused him of electoral fraud and armed clashes carried out by the rebel group Coalition of Patriots for Change broke out throughout the country.

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Germany, Sweden Boost Hunger Relief to 1.4Mln Refugees in Uganda - World Food Program

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Germany and Sweden have stepped in to provide \$5.6 million in additional funding to pay for food supplies for 1.4 million refugees from other African countries currently living in Uganda, the UN World Food Program (WFP) announced on Thursday.

"The WFP today commended Sweden and the Federal Republic of Germany for contributions to food and cash support for 1.4 million refugees in Uganda at a time when a surge of COVID-19 and its economic impact are threatening lives and livelihoods across the country," the organization said in a news release.

The WFP noted that Uganda has one of the world's most progressive policies for harboring refugees from other nations and currently is home to one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Sweden contributed \$1.2 million and Germany \$4.4 million for 2021 to 2023 in the relief program, it said.

"We appreciate the Federal Republic of Germany and Sweden for stepping forward to ensure Uganda continues to support refugees to survive during this difficult pandemic. We cannot, however, play down the threat of hunger that still looms over refugees," WFP Uganda Country Director El-Khidir Daloum said.

Refugees living in settlements receive monthly in-kind food assistance consisting of maize, beans, fortified oil and salt or cash to buy food, which injects money into local economies, the WFP also said.

Refugees in Uganda currently receive 60 percent of a full ration per month due to reduced funding. The WFP needs \$105 million this year for refugees but has received only 24 percent so far, it added.

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US Fines Medical Device Maker \$39M In Over Billing for Defective Tests - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The US medical device manufacturer Alere accepted a \$38.78 million penalty to resolve charges based on billing Medicare for defective point-of-care blood-testing equipment, the Justice Department said on Thursday.

"The settlement announced today resolves allegations that, from 2008 to 2016, Alere knowingly sold defective INRatio blood coagulation monitors used by Medicare beneficiaries taking anticoagulant drugs, such as warfarin," the Justice Department said in a press release.

The INRatio shows how quickly blood clots, an essential measurement needed to determine a clinically appropriate dosage of anticoagulant drugs. Too much of the drugs can cause major bleeding, and too little can cause blood clots and strokes, the release said.

Based on its own internal research, as well as external complaints and warnings, Alere allegedly was aware since at least 2008 that INRatio devices had a "system limitation" that produced inaccurate and unreliable results for some patients, the release added.

The settlement resolves charges that Alere violated the US False Claims Act in billing Medicare - a government-run health insurance program for seniors - for tests that the company knew were defective, according to the release.

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Number of US Weekly Jobless Claims Increases Again After 2-Week Gap - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The number of US jobless claims increased again last week after falling for two previous weeks in a row, with the Labor Department reporting an additional 2,000 filings for unemployment insurance this time that highlighted the job market's continued struggle for recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

"In the week ending July 3, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 373,000, an increase of 2,000 from the previous week's revised level," the Labor Department said in a news release.

Economists polled by US media had projected 350,000 jobless claims filings for the week that ended on July 3.

That claims rose despite half of the contiguous US states having stopped paying out unemployment insurance two months prior to the program's expiry was telling of the job market malaise, economist Adam Button said in a comment posted on ForexLive.

"Some 24 states have stopped the supplemental claims from being paid out ahead of the September 6 program end date," Button said.

Continuing claims for the week that ended on June 26 - reported with a one-week lag - was at 3.34 million versus the 3.48 million reading for the week to June 19. That brought the weekly reading for unemployment down by 0.1 percent to 2.4 percent.

The Labor Department said there were only 850,000 job additions for June. But as a whole, the United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of lockdowns and other restrictive measures during the coronavirus pandemic response. More than 7 million of those jobs have yet to return, officials say.

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US Report Attributes 1 in 4 COVID-19 Hospital Deaths to Surging Caseloads – Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - Surging COVID-19 infections during peak periods of the coronavirus pandemic, resulting in overloaded health care systems, could be responsible for up to a quarter of deaths for hospitalized patients, according to a report published by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on Thursday.

"A new study... suggests that one in four COVID-19 deaths in US hospitals may have been attributed to hospitals strained by surging caseloads," an NIH press release explaining the report said.

The surge–mortality relationship was stronger during surging COVID-19 hospital admissions from June to August 2020 versus March to May 2020, despite improved treatments as the pandemic progressed, the release said.

Surges were associated with mortality across patients in wards, intensive care units (ICU) and intubations, the release added.

By tracking caseload data, the report suggests hospitals could reduce deaths by preemptively diverting patients to other facilities and by requesting outside help sooner, according to the release.

The report was authored by NIH scientists, in collaboration with colleagues at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Harvard and Emory universities.

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Troika Nations Welcome Progress in South Sudan But Urges More Accountability - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) - The Troika nations of the US, UK, and Norway welcome the progress made in South Sudan since it gained independence ten years ago but say that greater accountability is needed to go further, the Troika said on Thursday.

"The Troika welcomes the progress that has been made but urges the signatories to accept accountability for their commitments and go much further, much faster," the Troika said in a joint statement.

The group added that while they commend the signing and implementation of a peace agreement in the country, there are many tasks outlined in the agreement that remain undelivered and many ordinary citizens who are not seeing the benefits of peace.

South Sudan is capable of becoming a peaceful and democratic nation, the Troika argued, but to realize that future they must prepare for credible and inclusive elections, establish transitional justice mechanisms, and implement key financial reforms in the country.

The Troika reaffirmed their eagerness to work in partnership with South Sudan's transitional government to implement peace and help build the country that the "jubilant crowds of 2011" thought possible upon the nation's founding.

South Sudan will be celebrating the 10-year anniversary of its independence on Friday.

However, the country has been experiencing ethnic violence between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and those loyal to his deputy, Riek Machar, since 2013. The two sides signed a peace agreement in 2018, but the UN says that they have been slow to implement it.

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Death Toll in Florida Building Collapse Reaches 60, 80 Still Unaccounted For – Mayor

WASHINGTON, July 8 (Sputnik) – The death toll of the building collapse in Surfside, Florida has reached 60 victims while 80 more residents remain unaccounted for as the rescue operation marks two weeks since the tragedy, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said on Thursday.

"The number of confirmed deaths is now 60 with 35 victims identified and 34 next of kin notified; 200 people are accounted for and 80 are potentially unaccounted for," Cava told reporters during a press briefing.